

## What Can Businesses Learn from Sports Coaching?

Participants find out at the 8th Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture

**Seven Key Principles to Success Outlined in Lecture – Authenticity, Trust, Control, Motivation, Client Needs, Peaking at the Right Time, and Knowing When to Say Nothing**

*“What can business and business coaching learn from sports coaching”,* this was the key question addressed at the 2012 Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture, delivered by Dr. Simon Jenkins, Principal Lecturer in Sports Coaching from the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University.

In his address, Simon looked at the seven ways in which coaches can get the best from athletes and how these might be applied to business coaching. These seven key principles related to authenticity, trust, controlling the controllable, motivation, meeting a client or athlete’s needs, peaking at the right time, and the importance of being non-directive.

- The first key principle was the importance of **being authentic** or in the words of legendary American basketball coach, John Wooden, being *“true to yourself”*. This requires the need to be *“aware of one’s strengths and weaknesses as well as one’s feelings and to develop a coaching style to fit this,”* according to Simon. Examples used were former football and rugby stars, Roy Keane and Martin Johnson, who had struggled to step up from players to management without having the necessary coaching and building of self-awareness.
- The need to **care for athletes** and **build trusting relationships** was also viewed as central to coaching success. *“In this respect, the big picture is important with coaches not just concerned with the athletes doing well in the sport but also concerned with promoting the athletes’ personal growth through a value-laden approach to coaching,”* according to Simon.
- Great coaches must also be able to **control the controllable** and **empower their athletes**. According to Simon, this is about creating an elite environment that enables players to develop high performance behaviours and then *“leading your athletes through empowering them”*. Here Simon pointed to the work of Alan Fox, a quarter finalist at Wimbledon and an American Davies Cup tennis player.

In his work, Fox argued that the most important point in terms of having coaching control is coaches’ hunger for success and emotional investment. *“If you are going to*

*push your players hard, set high moral standards and have a values-based approach, then you have to walk the walk and talk the talk and be seen to be investing emotionally in the programme as well,"* Simon stressed.

Later on, in the panel discussion Simon stressed the importance of athletes or business coaching clients not operating in a climate of fear where they are afraid to make mistakes. *"You cannot control winning so don't try to,"* Simon said.

- Coaches also need to create a **motivational climate** with an **emphasis on effort and learning**. Simon argued that there is a difference between this and a focus on winning with the important factor being performance improvement in relation to one's own standards. Here, a positive culture is much more effective than a fear-driven culture with a lot of poor coaching driven by fear.
- The fifth principle was that coaches must also **treat each athlete according to their needs**. Here, Simon referenced the Pygmalion effect - the phenomenon in which the greater the expectation placed upon people, the better they perform in what becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Simon cautioned, however, that this can often have a negative effect on coaching in that coaches will tend to give more attention to those that they feel are ultimately going to be the best at the expense of others.
- Coaches must also **apply the principles of training and try to ensure their athletes peak at the right time**. In this part of the lecture, Simon introduced the concept of periodisation where you can't work on everything at the same time at the same intensity. Training needs to be very carefully structured, not just over a week, month or even a year but over a three year period or a whole Olympic cycle. That's how Usain Bolt, through his coach, Glen Mills, peaks when it really matters.
- The final principle was **knowing when to be Directive and Non-Directive**. *"Great coaches don't talk too much and less experienced and competent coaches often talk too much,"* Simon continued. *"The great sports coaches know when to stand back, to observe, to listen and choose their moments to use words for motivation."*

Simon also cited research that demonstrates that when athletes appear highly motivated and their self efficacy is high, with a belief that they can accomplish a particular task, then that is a time when coaches should take a back seat.

The lecture was followed by a general discussion which involved a distinguished panel including Dick Tyler, Senior Partner of CMS Cameron McKenna LLP and a three times Cambridge Blue for Rugby; Juan Coto, European HR Director of CH2M HILL and a former tennis player for Spain; and Meyler Campbell founder, Anne Scoular.

Comments which came out of the panel discussion included:

- According to Anne Scoular, the fact that, while close laboratory level analysis had been conducted into what coaches do, little comparable research had been done into leadership and executive coaching. *"This needs to change,"* Anne argued.

- Dick Tyler also raised the point that coaches often focus more on getting their athletes to master a particular skill by repetition, rather than focusing on the end result. This approach could be transferred into the world of business, Dick continued, which tends to be very results-oriented and competitive without focusing as much on the inputs.
- Juan Coto also raised the importance of mental preparation and how it can be applied to business, citing the 16 second cure developed by Dr James Loehr for tennis which focuses on how you spend your time between points to ensure mental preparation.

Simon answered that pre-performance routines that can enhance mental focus can be used right across sport and business – in preparation for a presentation, for example. *“It is often important to look at that interaction between the mental and the physical”,* Simon stressed. *“Under pressure people tend to revert to what they know best. If that is a bad habit you have got to be very mindful and do a lot of psychological skills training to be able to overcome those bad habits.”*

The importance of visualisation was also raised by Juan where visualising success can be very helpful when it comes to a negotiation or delivery of a presentation in a business environment, for example. Simon described this as *“mental practice”* or *“mental rehearsal”* and introduced a number of relaxation techniques for the audience to consider.

*“For a long time I have felt there to be a gap between the world of leadership coaching and high-performance sport,”* said **Meyler Campbell Founder, Anne Scoular**. *“We quietly know something about it but are missing having it as part of our toolkit.”*

*“This year’s lecture has helped plug that gap and we are delighted that Simon has been able to enlighten us and fulfil the annual lecture’s brief of bringing in a world-expert in a related field to help shake up ours. There’s also no better timing than for this to take place during Olympic Year when the whole of the country have been inspired by our nation’s athletes.”*

The 2012 Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture introduced by **Stephen Newton** who, in his summing up remarks, thanked Simon for a *“fascinating lecture.”*

*“What we have learned today is that winning is an outcome of three things – belief, preparation and a strong work ethic. There is much we can learn in the business world from this as well as the linkages to positive psychology. If we are able to enhance our expectations of ourselves and enable clients to enhance their expectations of themselves, then we can both become better performers. Thank you Simon for a fascinating lecture.”*

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## About Dr Simon Jenkins

Dr Simon Jenkins has pioneered bridging the worlds of high performance sport, and business/leadership coaching. He founded the *Annual Review of High Performance Coaching and Consulting*, (ARHPCC) an international, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal

focused on the transfer of knowledge and skills from sport to business and vice versa, especially with regard to “communication, motivation, leadership, talent identification and management, team building, organisational behaviour, and performance psychology”. Both sides had rich insights, research, and practitioner experience - but until ARHPCC there was a vast gulf between them, both knowing almost nothing about the other. The first 2009 issue devoted 80 pages to the GROW model including 11 expert commentaries capturing the history of the tool, and deeply debating its usage. In 2010 the theme was “What executive coaching could do for football”, and in 2011, “Coaching philosophy: eclecticism and positivity”.

Following a First-Class Honours Degree in Sports Science through the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), Simon earned a Doctorate in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford (1994) based on research carried out with players on the PGA European Tour. The title of his thesis was “Conscious and Unconscious Control in Highly Learned Motor Actions”. As a competitive golfer, Simon was an Oxford University Golf Blue (1990-1992) and assisted in coaching of the Oxford University team for the annual match against Cambridge University (1993-2001) with a win/loss record of 7/2.

Currently Principal Lecturer in Sports Coaching in the Carnegie Faculty at Leeds Metropolitan University, Simon is also the author of *Sports Science Handbook: The Essential Guide to Kinesiology, Sport and Exercise Science*.

### **About Meyler Campbell**

Meyler Campbell ([www.meylercampbell.com](http://www.meylercampbell.com)) trains and develops senior business people to coach in demanding contexts through its fully accredited Business Coach Programme. Meyler Campbell also hosts Europe’s most dynamic learning community for business coaches and leaders.

This is the eighth Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture, an opportunity for business coaches to listen to new thinking by a world expert from a related field.

Past speakers include:

- **Professor Carol Kauffman** of Harvard University and one of America’s leading academics and thinkers on coaching;
- **Professor Paul Babiak**, a leading industrial and organizational psychologist and co-author of the highly acclaimed book *‘Snakes in Suits – When Psychopaths Go to Work’*;
- **Professor Felicia A Huppert**, Director of the Well-Being Institute at the University of Cambridge;
- **Doctor Geoff Bird**, an expert in neuroscience and its relevance to society and business;
- **Professor Shlomo Ben-Hur** of IMD, one of the world’s leading business schools based in Lausanne, Switzerland, who discussed the importance of coaching in improving team decision-making and the dangers of Groupthink in his talk – *‘Coaching Executive Teams to Reach Better Decisions’*.